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ABSTRACT

The School Organization program of the Center for Social Organization of Schools is currently concerned with authority-control structures, task structures, reward systems, and peer group processes in schools. This report, prepared by the School Organization program, examines one aspect of authority-control structures in high schools--content of school rules and procedures for deciding them--to determine their relationship to school stability. The analyses of survey data from 3,450 students in 14 urban high schools show that a school's stability (rates of truancy, vandalism, and protests) is related to its procedures for deciding rules as well as to the content of the school rules. The results are discussed in terms of Lipset's theory of legitimacy and effectiveness as sources of stability in societies. (Author/JF)

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HIGH SCHOOL RULES AND DECISION-MAKING PROCEDURES AS SOURCES OF SCHOOL STABILITY

CONTRACT NO. NE-C-00-3-0115
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Introductory Statement

The Center for Social Organization of Schools has two primary objectives: to develop a scientific knowledge of how schools affect their students, and to use this knowledge to develop better school practices and organization.

The Center works through three programs to achieve its objectives. The Schools and Maturity program is studying the effects of school, family, and peer group experiences on the development of attitudes consistent with psychosocial maturity. The objectives are to formulate, assess, and research important educational goals other than traditional academic achievement. The School Organization program is currently concerned with authority-control structures, task structures, reward systems, and peer group processes in schools. The Careers and Curricula program bases its work upon a theory of career development. It has developed a self-administered vocational guidance device and a self-directed career program to promote vocational development and to foster satisfying curricular decisions for high school, college, and adult populations.

This report, prepared by the School Organization program, examines one aspect of authority-control structures in high schools--content of school rules and procedures for deciding them--to determine their relationship to school stability.

Abstract

Analyses of survey data from 3,450 students in 14 urban high schools show that a school's stability (rates of truancy, vandalism and protests) is related to its procedures for deciding rules as well as the content of the school rules. The results are discussed in terms of Lipset's theory of legitimacy and effectiveness as sources of stability in societies.

Introduction

Minimizing student withdrawal, disobedience and revolt is an important current issue in the public schools. Schools need a stable social order to be able to concentrate on their main goal of educating students. However, schools differ in the problems they face in maintaining stability, as is indicated by the variations among high schools in rates of student truancy, vandalism and protests.

Differences among schools in student body characteristics may explain some of these variations, but it is important to learn whether features of a school's formal structure may also influence school stability. This paper will examine two aspects of the formal organization of schools which may affect a stable social order: the procedures used to determine school rules and the content of the rules.

The distinction we make between the procedures for deciding rules and the content of the rules is similar to a distinction that political theorists have found useful in studying stability among nation-states. Lipset (1963) has offered the explanation that the stability of a society depends upon both (1) the use of political procedures that are seen to be appropriate by major segments of the population (which he calls "legitimacy"), and (2) the content of political decisions that satisfy the basic needs of major societal groups (which he calls "effectiveness"). Lipset sees the most politically stable societies as high on both legitimacy and effectiveness. This paper will test this theory as it may apply to the stability of the social order in schools.

The distinction between school decision-making procedures and the content of school rules is of practical importance as well as of theoretical interest. If only the content of school rules is important

for stability, then school officials need not be concerned with involving students in the formation and administration of rules. In this case, the most successful school administrator may be the "benevolent despot" who independently establishes and enforces rules that effectively meet the basic needs of the school community. On the other hand, if the procedures by which the rules are made and enforced are also important, then schools may need to make basic changes to let students participate in the decision-making process. The possibility exists, however, that the procedures that are most acceptable to students will not result in rules that are most satisfying. For example, decision-making procedures involving student representatives may produce stricter and less acceptable rules that would result from adult officials deciding alone. In this case, the optimum level of school stability might occur at some intermediate level of the separate dimensions of rule-making procedures and rule content.

The analyses in this study differ from most previous research on problems of school stability. The research literature on sources of student protests or revolts deals mainly with college students (e.g., Astin, 1968; Bayer and Astin, 1969; Flacks, 1967; Sasajima, Davis, & Peterson, 1968; Keniston, 1971), but this study uses a high school sample. Other studies of high school samples that concern student withdrawal from school have usually focused on individual student experiences (Lichter et al., 1962; Cervantes, 1965; Combs & Cooley, 1968) rather than school structure, which will be emphasized here. The occasional studies that have examined high school structure and student reactions to school life have considered very broad aspect of bureaucratic school structure (e.g., Anderson, 1973; Alexander & Farrell, 1973); however, this study distinguishes between school rules and decision-making procedures.

Two separate analyses are reported in this paper. First, the subjective impressions of high school students as reflected by their expressed satisfaction with procedures and rules are examined as sources of school stability. Second, the objective differences between decision-making procedures are studied by comparing particular high schools known to have contrasting structures.

Method and Results

The data come from a survey of high school students conducted in the spring of 1970. Fourteen high schools were selected from two large urban school systems in the Middle Atlantic states to obtain a sample of schools that varied in the racial and social class composition of students. In each school, a one-quarter sample of students from grades 11 and 12 was selected. This sampling was accomplished by grouping the English classes of each school into three categories according to the achievement level of the average student and randomly choosing one-quarter of the classes in each group.

The questionnaires were administered in the selected classrooms by the University research staff. A total of 3,450 students were surveyed in the fourteen schools. Table 1 presents some relevant social and demographic statistics for the sample of each school to indicate the heterogeneity of student bodies represented in this study.

Insert Table 1 about here

Analysis of Student Evaluations of Rules and Procedures

We begin by examining the relationships of school stability to students' satisfaction with the existing school rules and rule-making

procedures.

Three measures of school stability are available for these analyses: (1) truancy (2) vandalism, and (3) student protests. Table 2 gives the student questionnaire items used for the measures. Each measure represents a different aspect of the stability of the school's social order: truancy indicates student inclination to withdraw from the situation, vandalism their approval of disobedient or destructive behavior, and protests their perceived justification for revolts. Each of the three measures of school stability will be examined separately for its relationship with several school and student variables.

Insert Table 2 about here

There are four sets of independent or predictor variables used in the analyses: the first three deal with features of the school, and the fourth concerns student factors. Table 2 also presents the questionnaire items used for each of the independent variables.

The first school variable is "student satisfaction with existing school rules," which indicates the perceived appropriateness of the content of school rules. This variable is measured by a single question about the desirability of certain school rules irrespective of the procedures used in establishing them. The second school variable is "student satisfaction with their participation in rule-making," which is a measure of the legitimacy of the decision-making procedures. This measure is constructed from the difference between student responses to two separate items, one that deals with students' actual participation in rule-making and the other that concerns their desired participation.

This analysis is primarily concerned with the effects of these two variables (satisfaction with the content of the rules and satisfaction with the rule-making procedures). The remaining variables are included in the analyses as statistical "controls" to separate the effects of the first two measures from other possible sources of school stability. The control variables include an index of the "perceived quality of the instructional program" and several measures of individual student background characteristics. Perceived quality of instructional program is expected to influence the drawing power and attractiveness of a school and therefore needs to be held constant if we are to determine the separate effects of rules and procedures on truancy and other aspects of school stability. Likewise, because certain kinds of students may be more favorable toward school in general, some student background factors will be taken into account. The student characteristics are age (grade), sex, race, and family socio-economic status.

Multiple regression analysis is used to determine the relationships among the variables. Because there are three separate measures of school stability (truancy, vandalism and protest), a separate multiple regression analysis of each measure on the various independent (predictor) variables was conducted. Table 3 gives the results of these analyses in terms of regression coefficients and their test statistics. The standardized regression coefficient (b) for each independent variable indicates the size of the relationship with the stability measure when all other independent variables are held constant. Because the coefficients are expressed in standardized form, they can be directly compared with one another to determine the relative importance of each independent variable. The t-statistic used to test whether each regression coefficient is statistically different from zero is provided in the table.

Insert Table 3 about here

The results in Table 3 show that both the content of school rules and the procedures for establishing them are significantly related to school stability as measured by the three dependent variables. The first row of regression coefficients in Table 3 indicates that students who are more satisfied with existing school rules are significantly less inclined towards truancy, vandalism, and protests, when all the other independent variables are taken into account statistically (-.044, -.078 and -.115 respectively). The second row of coefficients shows that after the other independent variables are controlled, students who are more satisfied with their participation in rule-making are also significantly less prone to truancy, vandalism and protest (-.125, -.146 and -.185).

Moreoever, the results presented in this table suggest that school stability depends more on the procedures for creating rules than on the content of existing rules. For each measure of school stability, the regression coefficient for "satisfaction with participation in rulemaking" is considerably larger than the coefficient for "satisfaction with existing rules."

These results are based on differences in students' subjective satisfaction with school rules and decision-making procedures. Thus, these results may depend on variations in individual expectations or perceptions as well as on objective differences in school practices. For example, in this analysis the same school may receive a high score for one student and a low score for another either because individuals judge the same experience differently or because students actually have

different experiences in the same school. In this analysis of student satisfaction with rules and procedures, there was no way to differentiate the objective from the subjective sources of variation. An additional analysis was performed which directly compares schools with objectively different practices regarding school rules.

Analysis of School Comparisons

In the sample of fourteen high schools, one had institutionalized a high degree of student participation in decisions concerning rules. This school had, for many years, maintained a student court that handled a large number of the student discipline cases. The court was composed entirely of student representatives and had the authority to decide the guilt or innocence of the accused student offenders brought before it, and to punish those whom it deemed appropriate. In effect, the student court gave student representatives an effective voice in determining school rules, because the court was able to weaken or strengthen regulations through the kinds of penalties it assessed.

Both teachers and students in the school recognized that students had an unusual share of authority in school discipline matters. In a survey of teachers, only 9% in the other thirteen schools reported that students actually have a great deal of say in discipline, whereas 53% of the teachers in the school with the student court responded this way. In the student survey, the comparative percentages were 14 and 37.

A measure was constructed which assigned the value 1 to students in the student-court school and the value 0 to students in all other schools. This measure was used in a regression analysis to compare the school using student-court procedures with other schools on each of the measures of school stability. In contrast to the analysis reported earlier using a measure of student satisfaction with rule-making

procedures, this measure provides a more objective comparison of differences in procedures for school rules.

Another new measure was chosen to provide a less subjective indication than before of the content of school rules. This measure was based on an item in the student questionnaire that asked each individual to rate the strictness of the rules in his or her school.[1] The new measure shows less variation within schools than the previous measure, which suggests that it is a more objective indicator of the content of school rules.

Table 4 gives the results of multiple regression analyses using the two new measures, together with five control variables. In this table, the first independent variable is the measure contrasting students in the student-court school to all others, and the second variable is the student report of strictness of school rules. The remaining independent variables are the same measures that were used as statistical controls in the earlier analyses (perceived quality of instructional program, and student grade, sex, race, and socio-economic status). As before, a separate regression was performed for each of three dependent variables--truancy, vandalism, and protests.

Insert Table 4 about here

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[1] The questionnaire item used for this measure is "In your opinion, how strict are the rules in this school compared to other high schools?" The response options and scoring are as follows: Much stricter = 1, A little stricter = 2, About the same = 3, A little less strict = 4, Much less strict = 5.

An examination of the regression coefficients in Table 4 shows again that both the procedures for deciding school rules and the content of the rules are significantly related to the three dependent variables. The first row of regression coefficients shows that after the other variables are statistically controlled, the students attending the student-court school are significantly less inclined toward truancy, vandalism and protests. The second row shows that students who perceive less strict school rules tend to have lower propensities toward truancy, vandalism, and protests. The regression coefficients reach high levels of statistical significance for two of the three measures of stability when the other independent variables are controlled and have the same sign in each case.

Thus, the main finding is the same whether measures of student satisfaction are used as independent variables as in Table 3 or whether measures of more objective school comparisons are employed as in Table 4: both decision-making procedures and the content of school rules are related to the extent a school maintains a stable social order.

It is important to have the clearest possible evidence that the procedure for deciding rules has a separate influence on school stability apart from the content of the rules. Some additional analyses comparing the school with the student court with the other thirteen schools were performed to document that the procedures were influential independently of the content of the decisions.

For one additional analysis, the sample of students was divided into two subsamples, one consisting of those individuals who have been personally disciplined in school (sent to the office or suspended) and the other consisting of those who have not been disciplined. Regression analyses of school comparisons were performed separately for each

subsample. If the existence of the student court procedure is influential apart from the content of the decisions made about discipline, then the sampe pattern of relationships should appear for the disciplined and non-disciplined students. Table 5 shows that the same pattern of results does exist for both subsamples.[1] The relationships between attendance at the student-court school are in the same direction for both groups with regard to truancy, vandalism and protests, and there is no indication that the relationship is stronger for one group than another across all three measures.

Insert Table 5 about here

A further indication that the procedures in the student-court school have influences separate from the content of the decisions is the fact that this school is reported to be the most strict of all schools in the sample. Fifty-one percent of the students in the school with the student court reported that their school rules were stricter than other schools, compared to an average of 24% in other schools. No other individual school had a higher percentage of students reporting stricter school rules. Thus, it is not the case that the student-court procedures yield decisions which make the content of the school rules more acceptable to students. In spite of the fact that content of rules is more restrictive in this school, its students are less inclined toward

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[1] Unstandardized regression coefficients are used in Table 5 because comparisons are made between different groups on the same measures where the standard deviation on the measures may not be the same in each group. To insure comparability, the relationships are expressed here in the original units rather than in standard deviation units of the standardized coefficients.

truancy, less tolerant of vandalism, and less approving of student protests.

Discussion

This paper has applied elements of Lipset's macro-level theory of the political sources of societal stability to the setting of the school. Specifically, evidence has been presented which suggests that both the content of school rules (which is analogous to Lipset's concept of effectiveness) and the procedures for deciding them (analogous to his notion of legitimacy) are of consequence for minimizing school problems of withdrawal, disobedience and revolt. Thus, the results offer some support for Lipset's hypothesis that the stability of a social system is partly a function of the effectiveness and legitimacy of its political system. However, a discussion of some of the details of the findings will place the importance of these variables for the school context in clearer perspective.

Analogous to Lipset's (1963) recognition that other variables besides those in the political system are related to stability in a large society, these results indicate that school decision-making procedures and rules are certainly not the only significant variables affecting school stability. The multiple regression analyses summarized in Tables 3 and 4 show that individual student characteristics and the quality of the school's program are also significantly related to truancy, vandalism and protests. Furthermore, <u>all</u> of the variables included in these analyses account for only a small

proportion of the total variation in stability measures,[1] suggesting that there are factors in student experience not included in this study which have greater influence.

Lipset viewed the level of economic development as one of the important variables outside of the political system which accounts for societal stability. In this connection, one of the variables introduced into this analysis, "perceived quality of instructional program," may be seen as an indicator of the extent to which a school is meeting its members' principal needs. Viewed in this way, this measure may correspond to Lipset's variable of economic development in his societal theory. As he would predict, quality of instructional program was shown to have a significant relationship with each of the school stability measures.

The distinction made between subjective measures in Table 3 and objective measures in Table 4 is an important one for understanding the practical utility for schools of Lipset's conception of the political system. Legitimacy as defined by Lipset (1963) is a subjective property of political systems, determined by how the population evaluates the decision-making procedures in light of their own values and expectations. According to this view, no particular political procedure has inherent legitimacy or will be related to societal stability for all populations and time periods. Thus, the results from our analyses of the subjective evaluation of school procedures and rules (Table 3) indicate that these factors are important for school stability, without implying anything about the specific kinds of decision-making procedures and rules which

[1] The squared multiple correlation coefficients in the analyses (which indicated the "proportion of variance explained") range from .05 to .10. This suggests, even after acknowledging the possibility of considerable unreliability of measures and random effects, the likelihood of other important but unmeasured variables which will better explain the dependent variables.

will be considered appropriate by students. Similarly, the findings from an objective comparison (Table 4) that a school with a student court has fewer problems of instability, does not mean that the same decision-making procedure would necessarily have the same influence on a different student population or at a later time. However, because the sample for this study is typical of student populations of many urban school systems, this finding does suggest that new procedures to permit increased student participation in decision-making may have positive consequences for school stability.

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TABLE 1

Selected Characteristics of Sampled High Schools

School I.D.	Sample Size	% Black	% of Students whose fathers had at least some college	% Male	% in College Prep Program	Summary description
01	185	76.4	24.4	100.0	67.6	Integrated - Black, middle class
02	183	100.0	7.8	42.2	29.4	Black, lower class
03	166	99.4	4.7	41.0	10.3	Black, lower class
04	297	97.6	8.2	39.4	26.1	Black, lower class
05	284	97.9	13.7	24.5	33.8	Black, middle class
06	386	15.7	28.0	45.6	43.1	Integrated - White, middle class
07	317	53.8	27.9	44.1	61.7	Integrated - middle class
08	229	4.4	9.2	52.6	24.2	White, lower class
09	367	14.0	32.9	100.0	74.2	White, middle class
10	227	20.3	6.1	48.4	36.7	Integrated - White, lower class
11	222	96.3	12.9	34.9	42.4	Black, lower class
12	273	97.0	28.5	43.1	60.1	Black, middle class
13	132	67.2	35.7	47.0	47.5	Integrated - Black middle class
14	182	29.0	70.6	48.6	77.8	Integrated - White, middle class
Total	3450	58.3	22.2	51.4	48.3	

TABLE 2

Measurement of Variables

Variable	Questionnaire item (s) and scoring
Truancy	"During the last school year, did you ever stay away from school just because you didn't want to come?" Never = 1; Yes, for 1 or 2 days = 2; Yes, for 3 to 6 days = 3; Yes, for 7 to 15 days = 4; Yes, for 16 or more days = 5.
Vandalism	"Suppose you saw some students who were damaging property of this school, would you feel sorry to see this happen?" Very sorry = 1; Somewhat worry = 2; Wouldn't care = 3; Not sorry at all = 4.
Student protests	"Students can only get really important changes here by having a protest or demonstration to force the change." Strongly Agree = 4; Agree = 3; Disagree = 2; Strongly Disagree = 1.
Student satisfaction with existing school rules	"What do you think of the different rules and ways things are done at this school? Are they very good, very bad, or somewhere in between: The rules this school has about dress codes, hair styles, smoking hall passes, etc." (Scores range from Very good = 5 to Very bad = 1).
Student satisfaction with their participation in rule-making.	The scale score is the difference between answers to two questions: (1) "How often do students actually have an important part now in deciding things here at this school? [regarding] school rules such as dress codes, hair styles, smoking rules, hall passes, etc," and (2) "How often do you think students should have an important part in the future in deciding things here at this school? [regarding] school rules, such as dress codes, hair styles, smoking rules, hall passes, etc." Each separate item is scored from 5 for 'always' to 1 for 'never'; so that the difference between the item scores can range in value from -4 to +4.
Perceived quality of instructional program	The scale score is the combination of responses to three items: (1) "Compared to other schools, this school provides a first-rate education." (Agree = 1, Disagree = 0); (2) "Do you think attending this high school gives a student a better or worse chance of getting into a first-rate college than some other high school in this system?" (3) "Do you think attending this school gives a better or worse chance of getting a good job?" The second and third items are scored as follows: Much better, or A little better = 1, About the same, or A little worse, or Much worse = 0.
Family socio-economic status	The scale score is a weighted combination of six variables: (1) number of siblings, (2) father's education, (3) mother's education, (4) number of material possessions in the home (from a checklist of 10 items), (5) presence of real father in the home, (6) presence of real mother in the home. The weights for the six (standardized) variables in the above order are -.14, .15, .14, -.11, .04, .02. These weights were obtained from a multiple regression of student's college plans on the six measures

TABLE 3

Summary of Multiple Regression Analyses of Student Satisfaction with Rules and with Participation in Rule-Making

(b = standardized regression coefficient; t = test statistic; R = multiple correlation coefficient, n = sample size.)

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable					
	Truancy		Vandalism		Student Protests	
	b	t	b	t	b	t
Satisfaction with existing rules	-.044	-2.57	-.078	-4.66	-.115	-6.92
Satisfaction with participation in rule-making	-.125	-7.37	-.146	-8.71	-.185	-11.18
Perceived quality of school instruction	-.147	-8.60	-.106	-6.29	-.100	-6.00
Grade	.042	2.55	-.036	-2.16	.028	1.73
Sex [a]	-.064	-3.78	-.114	-6.65	-.034	-1.98
Race [b]	.092	5.23	-.109	-6.26	-.150	-8.75
Family socio-economic status	-.023	-1.35	.048	2.78	.050	2.93
n	3,450		3,450		3,450	
R	.237		.267		.311	

a. Sex is scored 1 = Female, 0 = Male, for these analyses.

b. Race is scored 1 = Black, 0 = White, for these analyses.

TABLE 4

Summary of Multiple Regression Analyses of

School Comparisons

(b = standardized regression coefficient; t = test statistic;
R = multiple correlation coefficient; n = sample size)

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables					
	Truancy		Vandalism		Student Protests	
	b	t	b	t	b	t
Student court school	-.104	-5.38	-.075	-3.87	-.067	-3.42
Perceived non-strictness of rules	-.015	-0.88	-.035	-2.04	-.086	-5.02
Perceived quality of school instruction	-.139	-7.93	-.113	-6.46	-.121	-6.94
Grade	.042	2.51	-.032	-1.92	.036	2.18
Sex [a]	-.107	-6.02	-.152	-8.54	-.071	-4.02
Race [b]	.108	5.89	-.102	-5.59	-.147	-8.10
Family socio-economic status	-.014	-0.80	.059	3.39	.067	3.32
n	3450		3450		3450	
R	.213		.213		.229	

a. Sex is scored 1 = Female, 0 = Male, for these analyses.
b. Race is scored 1 = Black, 0 = White, for these analyses.

TABLE 5

Relationship of Attendance at Student-Court School With Truancy, Vandalism and Protests, For Two Subsamples of Students, With Six Variables Controlled [a]

(b' = unstandardized regression coefficient; n = sample size.)

Subsample of students	Relationship of Attendance at Student-Court School With:		
	Truancy b'	Vandalism b'	Protests b'
Students who have not been desciplined (n = 2156)	-.25	-.18	-.17
Students who have been desciplined (n = 967)	-.41	-.11	-.17

a. Control variables included in the analysis are: grade, race, sex, family socio-economic status, perceived non-strictness of rules, perceived quality of school instructional program.